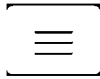




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Exide Finally Gets Around to Cleaning Up Toxic Mess . . . at 2 of 39 Homes

Thursday, August 14, 2014

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Residents living around the Exide Technologies battery recycling plant in the middle of Los Angeles County have been begging the city of Vernon, the county, the state and anyone who would listen for years to clean up the lead and arsenic contamination known to be emanating from it.

They finally got their wish, and yet, they still were not satisfied.

On Tuesday, the county board of supervisors blasted off a letter to Governor Jerry Brown complaining that the state Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) was still dragging its heels and that Exide had begun work on just two of the 39 houses designated for remediation in the industrial town of Vernon.

"The residents of these communities, which are already living at risk in a State-designated 'highly burdened community,' cannot tolerate a partially cleaned up community," the supervisors wrote.

When open, the plant recycles lead-bearing scrap materials and 23,000 to 41,000 automotive batteries daily as a cheap source of lead for its battery-making facilities. It has been closed since March, but the owner has vowed to reopen after upgrading the facility.

Although the plant has been under fire for years, it successfully fended off criticism until a South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) report a year ago said 110,000 people were at higher risk of cancer because of the plant's arsenic emissions.

Exide blames the contamination that has accumulated inside and outside the homes over the years on other sources, like lead paint, leaded gas and other past polluters in the area.

After testing in the area late last year, the DTSC ordered Exide to clean up the property around 39 homes, although frustrated residents and environmental groups claimed hundreds of properties were dangerous. But Exide didn't sign off on the March order and may not start on the other 37 homes before October, if then.

In the meantime, the DTSC has added 144 homes to the list of those it wants tested within two months.

Supervisor Gloria Molina blamed the toxic control department in a statement, saying, "Instead of championing environmental justice for communities heavily burdened by pollution from facilities like Exide, DTSC has been the greatest roadblock to progress."

Exide has operated with a temporary permit for more than a quarter century, taking advantage of a permitting system that the DTSC admits (pdf) is regarded with "significant dissatisfaction." It is one of the complaints heard from those who think the agency favors corporate interests over the public welfare.

-Ken Broder

To Learn More:

Exide to Remove Lead-Polluted Soil from 2 Homes North of Its Vernon Plant (by Molly Peterson, KPPC)

L.A. County Supervisors Blast Cleanup of Only 2 Homes Near Exide Plant (by Tony Barboza, Los Angeles Times)

Federal Government Finally Joins the Fray at Polluting Exide Battery Plant in L.A. County (by Ken Broder, AllGov California)

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